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SUBJECT: LIBERIA - SENATE BY-ELECTION RESULTS IN RUN-OFF

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11. SUMMARY. Voter turnout was low in the November 10 Montserrado Senate by-election, with just 20 percent of voters participating. None of the ten candidates took an absolute majority of votes, so the two leading candidates, Geraldine Doe-Sheriff of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) and Clemenceau Urey of President Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP) will face each other in a November 24 run-off. The November 10 election in Liberia's most populous county was a crucial test run for the National Elections Commission (NEC) ahead of the 2011 general election. Observers (including a number of Embassy volunteers) witnessed a number of procedural irregularities due to a lack of preparedness by the NEC and training for poll workers, but no instances of fraud were reported. In a meeting with the Ambassador, NEC commissioners admitted to several election day shortcomings and outlined corrections intended to smooth procedures during the upcoming runoff. There were no reports of violence, but UNMIL security responded to threats against the life of the NEC chairman. END SUMMARY.

RESULT IS RUN-OFF BETWEEN PRESIDENT'S PARTY  
AND ITS LARGEST OPPONENT  
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12. (U) Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC) officially released results from the November 10 Montserrado County Senate by-election on November 14. Geraldine Doe-Sheriff of the opposition Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) won the highest number of more than 95,000 votes cast, 33,874 or 35.5 percent. Clemenceau Urey of President Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP) placed second with 29.7 percent or 28,329 votes.

13. (U) No other candidate came close to matching Urey and Doe-Sheriff's levels of support. University professor Wilson Tarpeh of the Alliance for Peace and Democracy placed third with 16.3 percent (15,555) of votes counted. Following him were former warlord and independent candidate Al-Haji Kromah with 7 percent (6,729) and Darius Dillon of the Liberty Party polling 5.7 percent (5,148). None of the remaining five candidates who ran as independents managed to win more than 3 percent of ballots cast.

14. (U) Winning an absolute majority of votes is required for outright victory in the first round. As no contender won more than 50 percent of votes cast, Liberian law requires the two largest vote getters, Urey and Doe-Sheriff, to face each other in a run-off election scheduled for November 24.

15. (U) Most polling sites in populous Montserrado County were easily accessible, but voter turnout was low amidst light, intermittent rain showers. Only 20 percent of about 500,000 registered voters participated. (NOTE. All elections since

2005 in Liberia have used the electoral register created in that year for the country's post-war general election and current Liberian law does not require the compilation of a register between general elections. Therefore, voters who have relocated to Montserrado since 2005 could not participate. END NOTE.)

#### ELECTION DAY DEMONSTRATES NEC'S INEXPERIENCE

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¶6. (SBU) Embassy fielded 20 teams of two to three persons to observe the November 10 vote. No participant from the U.S. mission or any other international observation team reported instances of outright fraud. However, observer and media reports showed a notable shortfall in the capacity of Liberia's NEC. NEC Chairman James Fromayan admitted to the Ambassador in a November 17 meeting that poor planning was responsible for election day's shortcomings. Fromayan also conceded that NEC poll worker training had been inadequate. For example, despite the presence of guidance materials which clearly explained poll site activities, Embassy observers regularly witnessed inconsistently executed procedures at most locations, which showed that one day of training did not prepare the 4,850 poll workers for election day activities.

¶7. (SBU) While poll sites in the outskirts of the county opened on time and with few problems because of pre-positioned election materials and poll workers, many sites in central Monrovia opened two to three hours late, leading to restless crowds at many locations. Fromayan attributed this problem to the slow delivery of materials in the hours before polls opened by an insufficient number of

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large trucks that were caught in traffic and unable to easily navigate the city's poor streets. The NEC is working with the General Services Administration to provide a larger fleet of small trucks to more quickly deliver materials for the run-off election.

¶8. (SBU) The NEC's inability to fund the opening of all poll sites that were available during the 2005 election led to widespread confusion. Voters received little advance notice of the closing of some 2005 polling stations. Even though signs directed them to new polling locations, many voters did not end up at the correct site. NEC commissioners told Ambassador that many poll workers did not show up for work and the number of poll officials present was not sufficient to both run polling operations and redirect voters who showed up at the wrong site. The NEC plans to field more workers with additional training for the run-off. This may help prevent visible tensions between voters and poll workers who were often unwilling (or unable) to re-direct voters according to information of the voter's registration card during the November 10 vote. The aforementioned problem, plus instances of duplicate cards, wrong numbers written on cards, and some poll workers' inability to properly understand the registry meant that some voters were turned away or departed in frustration.

¶9. (SBU) Pre-election accusations against the Unity Party of buying voter registration cards (Ref D) meant that the matching of voter credentials to corresponding data listed in the voter registry was closely scrutinized by most candidate and party polling observers. While electoral rules state that candidate/party observers may stand within two meters of electoral workers, candidate/party observers were seen standing at various distances depending on the flexibility of a polling station's presiding officer. Observer locations ranged from cordoned off at the far end of the room behind a ribbon barrier to hovering over the voter registry. A dispute over positioning of candidate observers led to the one major disruption of the day when Liberty Party (LP) Chairman Israel Akinsaya was detained by police after ordering LP candidate observers to sit on a ballot box until observers were allowed to more closely monitor the voter

registry. Akinsaya was released a few hours later after a meeting with the Director of Police, where both sides agreed on the two-meter distance.

¶10. (SBU) The Liberia National Police (LNP) maintained order throughout the day and were visible in heavy numbers. However, many were posted within polling sites near the registry and voter booth, though no instances of intimidation were reported. NEC Chairman Fromayan repeated to the Ambassador his comment in the press that some poll opening delays were caused by LNP officers not showing up for duty. LNP Director Marc Amblard has denied that claim, and our observers saw no evidence of a lack of police presence at polls.

#### COUNTING ALSO SHOWS CAPACITY PROBLEMS

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¶11. (SBU) End of the day ballot counting was an open and transparent process witnessed by candidate and international observers. However, the lack of electricity at most locations left poll workers dependent on low-light halogen lamps that were ineffective at lighting. Ballot tallying began on November 11 at Monrovia City Hall and final results were expected by November 12. Despite low turnout, release of the official results was delayed by slow and deliberative manual counting by NEC workers meant to ensure transparency of the process. The NEC plans to add more personnel to its counting centers following the November 24 run-off.

¶12. (SBU) No instances of violence were reported on election day, but the slow tallying led to an atmosphere of suspicion among opposition parties who accused the NEC of conspiring with the Executive Mansion to rig the election in favor of an outright victory for the UP's Urey well in advance of election day. Monrovia city officials reported that a crowd of unruly CDC supporters attempted to enter City Hall on November 14 to find out why results had been delayed. City officials called in UNMIL security and the crowd subsequently moved to the NEC's headquarters shortly thereafter following the official release of results. Police and UNMIL soldiers have maintained a strong presence at NEC due to threats against the life of NEC Chairman James Fromayan.

¶13. (U) COMMENT: The NEC remains an inexperienced organization and this election in Liberia's most populous county has been both a learning experience and a critical test before the 2011 general elections. However, NEC

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officials have been receptive to recommendations from international and domestic groups on needed improvements and the U.S.-based International Foundation for Election Systems continues to work closely with the NEC to improve its capacity under a USAID-funded contract. The most disquieting aspect of the November 10 election was the presence of enthusiastic, sometimes rowdy crowds of youths and threats against the NEC's chairman's life which allegedly originate from opposition party supporters. This necessitates a visible role for the police (with UNMIL security support) in the run-off and a strong public message against election-related violence. Party leaders have been reluctant to reign in their supporters, but the Ambassador intends to press this issue in planned meetings with the run-off candidates.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD